



FINAL DECISION NOTICE AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT LIMITS OF STAY ON THE APPALACHIAN NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL WITHIN THE SOUTHERN REGION

U.S. FOREST SERVICE

SOUTHERN REGION

CHATTAHOOCHEE, NANTAHALA, CHEROKEE, PISGAH, GEORGE WASHINGTON, AND JEFFERSON NATIONAL FORESTS

GEORGIA, NORTH CAROLINA, TENNESSEE, VIRGINIA

DECISION

Based upon my review of the Limits of Stay on the Appalachian National Scenic Trail Within the Southern Region Environmental Assessment (EA), I have decided to implement the Proposed Action, which limits the stay at Appalachian Trail shelters, a single campsite, and two overnight sites within the Southern Region to three days within a 30-day period.

DECISION RATIONALE

The purpose of this initiative is to increase management consistency between the USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, and the National Park Service where management and administration of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (AT or Appalachian Trail) is concerned. The National Park Service is the congressionally designated “administrator” or lead agency for the AT. This action is needed because:

- The National Trails System Act (Public Law 90-543) states “the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture shall prescribe and publish such uniform regulations as they deem necessary” in order to maintain good conduct and protect resources. AT trail-wide limits of stay are uniformly within a one to three day range with the exception of the forests of the Southern Region and one other location outside the jurisdiction of the Southern Region. This proposed change would result in greater consistency in AT regulation, which, in turn, would result in less user confusion related to regulation;
- AT shelters and campsites exist to minimize and concentrate resource damage associated with hiker use along the trail and to benefit AT hikers. They were not designed for extended, multi-day use;
- Long-term stays at shelters or campsites strain already limited space capacities and make the facilities unavailable to persons participating in the primary AT recreation experience – hiking linearly along the trail.
- The campsite and overnight sites are included because they are either in immediate proximity to an affected shelter or they were established to replace a shelter that was too

damaged to restore. Appalachian Trail campsites and overnight sites that are not specifically identified in this proposal will not be affected.

The proposed alternative was the only one considered in detail. No other alternatives meet the need and purpose of the project.

The Limits of Stay on the Appalachian National Scenic Trail within the Southern Region EA documents the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Southern Region National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions and updated periodically during the analysis. People were invited to review and comment on the proposal through scoping letters mailed to the interested parties mailing lists maintained by each of the affected forests and a legal notice of public comment published in the Atlanta Journal Constitution on August 15, 2013.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This decision is consistent with the Chattahoochee, Nantahala/Pisgah, Cherokee, George Washington and Jefferson National Forests Land Management Plans. The project was designed in conformance with the Appalachian National Scenic Trail management prescriptions contained within each of the forest plans.

This Decision Notice also serves as a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). An EA was developed. I determined these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The significance of environmental impacts must be considered in terms of context and intensity. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human and national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. In the case of a site-specific action, significance usually depends upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Intensity refers to the severity or degree of impact. (40 CFR 1508.27)

CONTEXT

The proposal will be implemented on the Appalachian National Scenic Trail as it traverses some 750 miles through the Southern Region. By design, the Appalachian National Scenic Trail is primitive and routed away from developed areas, but it does go through roughly half a dozen small towns where it passes through valleys or gaps, and there are a few, short wheelchair-accessible sections. Hikers may encounter graded switchbacks, steep climbs, undulating ridges or rocky scrambles. The path is often rugged and narrow. Flat sections are infrequent, and

seldom last long. Many areas are rocky, especially in the northern half of the Trail. Almost every state has some steep or long climbs, but every state has some easy or moderate sections too. All offer rewarding experiences for those who are well prepared.

INTENSITY

The intensity of effects was considered in terms of the following:

1. **Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that, on balance, the effect will be beneficial.** Consideration of the intensity of environmental effects is not biased by beneficial effects of the action.
2. **The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.** There will be no significant effects on public health and safety (See EA page 3).
3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.** There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area (See EA page 3).
4. **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known credible scientific controversy over the impacts of the proposed action (See EA page 4).
5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.** The Agency has considerable experience with actions like the one proposed. The analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown (See EA page 4).
6. **The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.** The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects because the Appalachian National Scenic Trail is a highly unique congressionally designated resource not found throughout the agency (See EA page 1).
7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.** The cumulative impacts are not significant. The effects of the action are limited to the Appalachian National Scenic Trail within the Southern Region (See EA pages 2-4).
8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.** The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (See EA page 4). The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources because it is designed to protect

Appalachian National Scenic Trail shelters, one campsite, and two overnight sites from unintended uses (See EA page 1).

9. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.** The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973 (See EA page 4).
10. **Whether the action threatens to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.** The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment (See EA page 4).

After considering the effects of the actions analyzed, in terms of context and intensity, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

OBJECTION OPPORTUNITIES

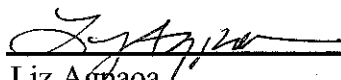
This decision was subject to objection pursuant to 36 CFR 218, and a legal notice of the opportunity to object was published on March 29, 2014 in the the Atlanta Journal Constitution and sent to those who provided comments during the project's development. No objections were filed during the 45-day objection filing period.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This project may be implemented immediately following signature of this Decision Notice.

CONTACT

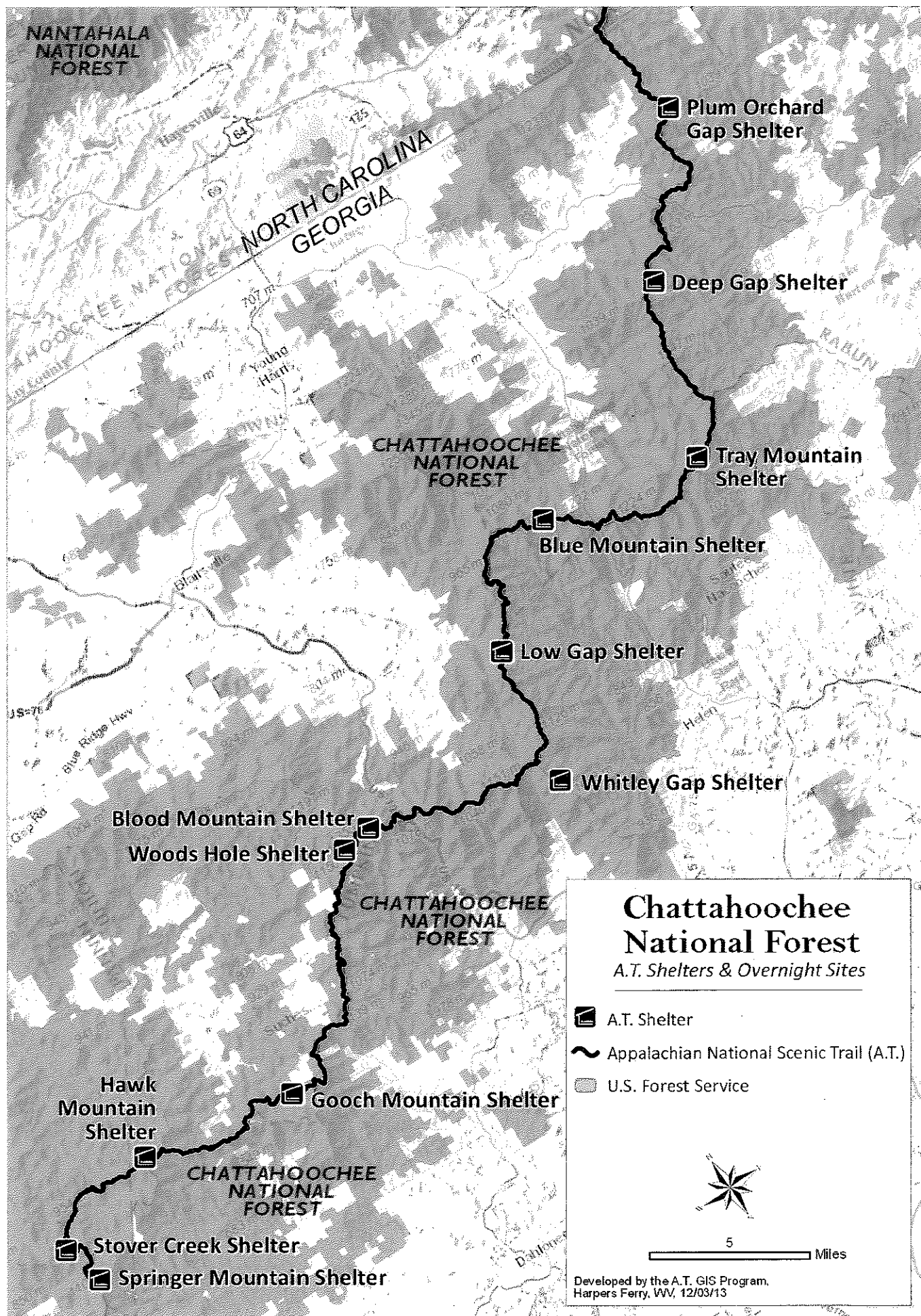
For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Michelle Mitchell, Appalachian Trail Liaison, 404-347-1749.

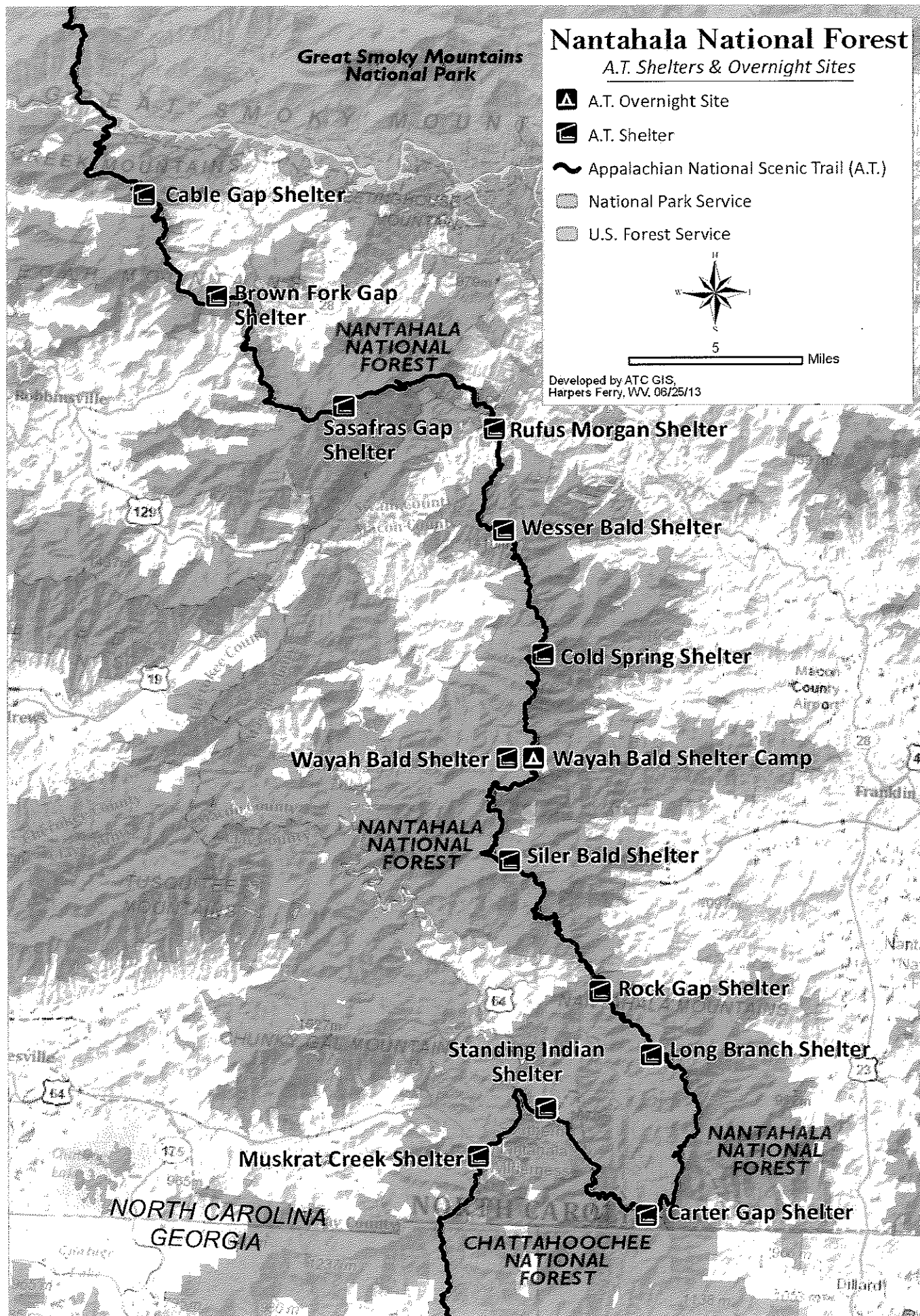

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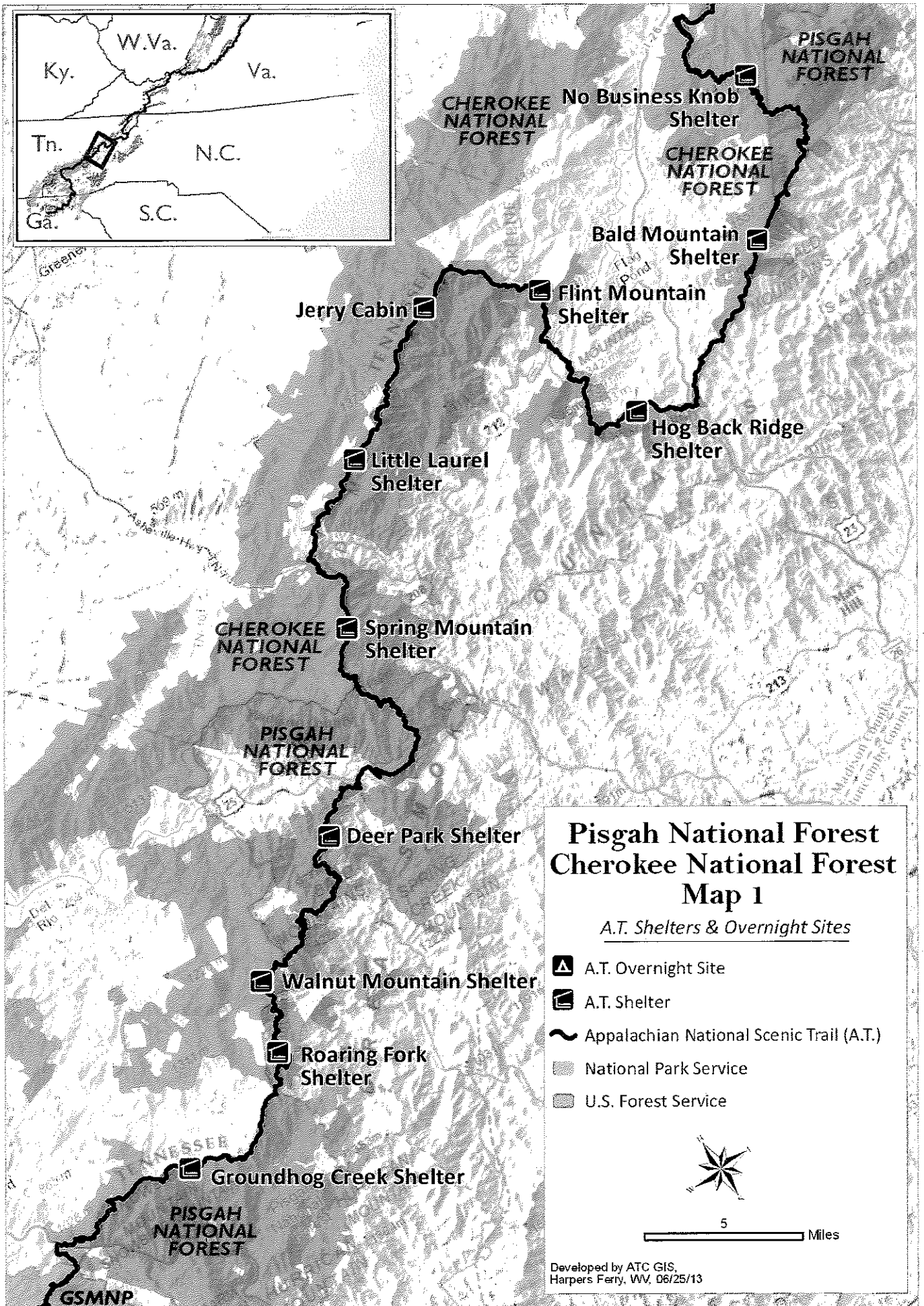
Regional Forester, Southern Region

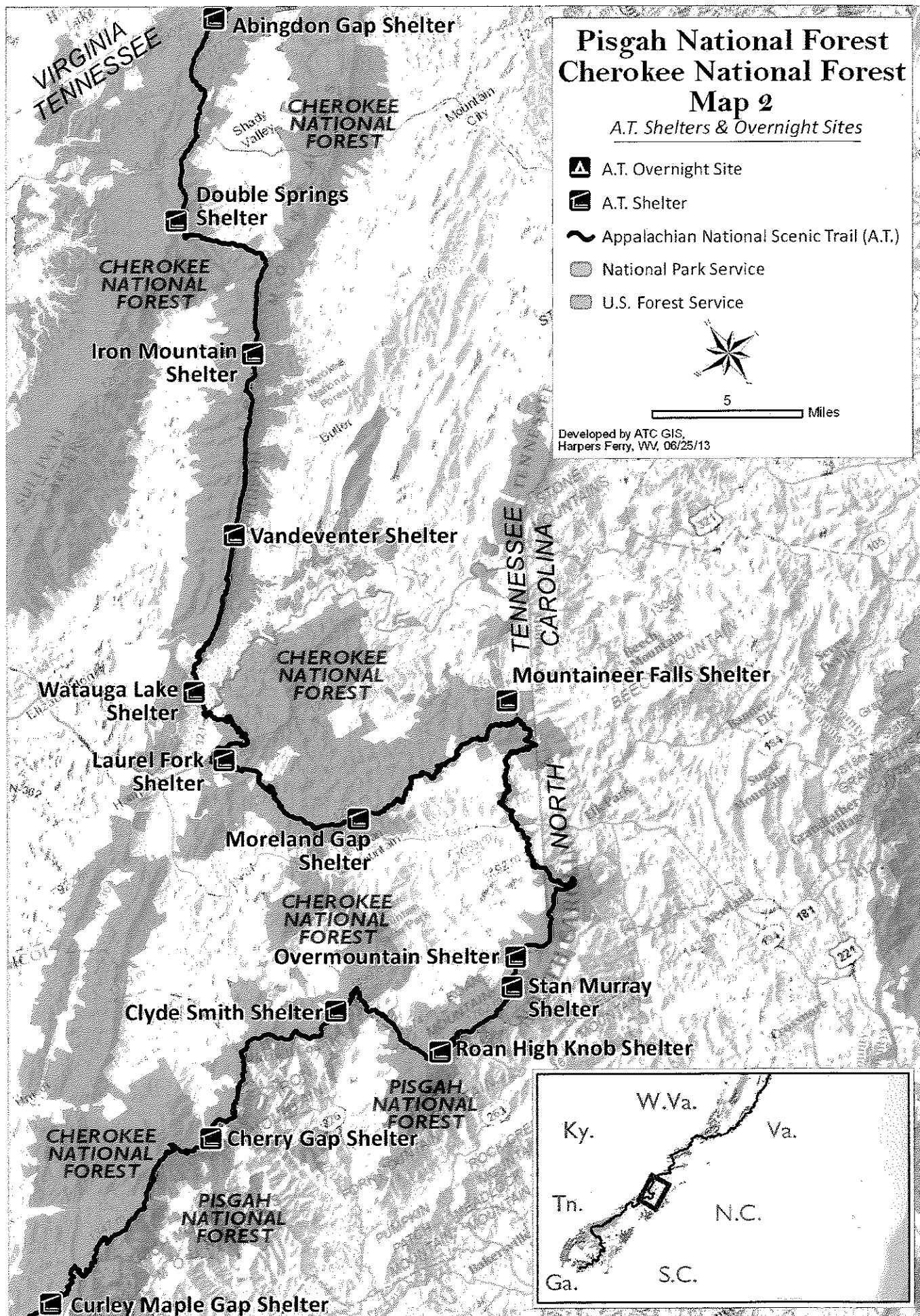
July 16, 2014
Date

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Latitude/Longitude Location Table

TYPE	NAME	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
Shelter	Springer Mountain	34.62933692	-84.19277863
Shelter	Stover Creek	34.6489383	-84.20018212
Shelter	Hawk Mountain	34.66591049	-84.13640247
Shelter	Gooch Mountain	34.65553	-84.05003
Shelter	Woods Hole	34.73712	-83.95505
Shelter	Blood Mountain	34.73991	-83.93752
Shelter	Whitley Gap	34.71248519	-83.83444688
Shelter	Low Gap	34.77615429	-83.82460076
Shelter	Blue Mountain	34.81719865	-83.76700837
Shelter	Tray Mountain	34.80400007	-83.67688609
Shelter	Deep Gap	34.88237	-83.64601
Shelter	Plum Orchard Gap	34.94582275	-83.58844281
Shelter	Muskrat Creek	35.02061043	-83.58155849
Shelter	Standing Indian	35.04178907	-83.54817507
Shelter	Carter Gap	34.99891461	-83.4942332
Shelter	Long Branch		
Shelter	Rock Gap	35.09147991	-83.52314819
Shelter	Siler Bald	35.14411	-83.57258
Shelter & Shelter Camp	Wayah Bald	35.18770184	-83.56213912
Shelter	Cold Spring	35.23098511	-83.56007841
Shelter	Wesser Bald	35.282497	-83.58245077
Shelter	Rufus Morgan	35.32420241	-83.59023037
Shelter	Sasafras Gap	35.33076622	-83.66699804
Shelter	Brown Fork Gap	35.37416831	-83.73402073
Shelter	Cable Gap	35.41516484	-83.77352181
Shelter	Groundhog Creek	35.7817418	-83.0264521
Shelter	Roaring Fork	35.80512	-82.94953
Shelter	Walnut Mountain	35.83640774	-82.93662957
Shelter	Deer Park	35.87588388	-82.86136687
Shelter	Spring Mountain	35.95171368	-82.7902817
Shelter	Little Laurel	36.015011621	-82.736067197
Shelter	Jerry Cabin	36.05644052	-82.65730275
Shelter	Flint Mountain	36.03477	-82.59678
Shelter	Hog Back Ridge	35.96398611	-82.58727281
Shelter	Bald Mountain	36.00007	-82.47823
Shelter	No Business Knob	36.06653147	-82.4338007

Latitude/Longitude Location Table

TYPE	NAME	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
Shelter	Curly Maple Gap	36.10422867	-82.39701247
Shelter	Cherry Gap	36.12914978	-82.2642725
Shelter	Clyde Smith	36.14847789	-82.1613053
Shelter	Roan High Knob	36.10497	-82.12237
Shelter	Stan Murray	36.11227	-82.06586
Shelter	Overmountain	36.12350664	-82.05440956
Shelter	Mountaineer Falls	36.2203	-81.9853
Shelter	Moreland Gap	36.22006187	-82.08847572
Shelter	Laurel Fork	36.27867	-82.13639
Shelter	Watauga Lake	36.3139	-82.12955
Shelter	Vandeventer	36.36696005	-82.05889593
Shelter	Iron Mountain	36.43532	-81.99111
Shelter	Double Springs	36.509042802	-81.986324204
Shelter	Abingdon Gap	36.58085664	-81.90196689
Shelter	Saunders	36.63768269	-81.71364332
Shelter	Lost Mountain	36.64407819	-81.65613228
Shelter	Thomas Knob	36.65652079	-81.53541959
Shelter	Old Orchard	36.6831933	-81.51118279
Shelter	Hurricane Mountain	36.7154746	-81.50966573
Shelter	Trimpi Shelter	36.74915776	-81.48054545
Shelter	Partnership	36.80945089	-81.42255732
Shelter	Louis Chatfield Memorial	36.84981649	-81.36323358
Overnight Site	Davis Path	36.91445909	-81.37699515
Shelter	Knot Maul	37.00072372	-81.40464698
Overnight Site	Davis Farm Campsite	37.08546964	-81.29351247
Shelter	Chestnut Knob	37.05768637	-81.39955594
Shelter	Jenkins	37.09335033	-81.2478142
Shelter	Helvey's Mill	37.13070645	-81.10314406
Shelter	Jenny Knob	37.15497	-80.98032
Shelter	Wapiti	37.22381412	-80.82430573
Shelter	Doc's Knob	37.27026716	-80.83639331
Shelter	Rice Field	37.37483297	-80.75855558
Shelter	Pine Swamp	37.42198354	-80.60868343
Shelter	Bailey Gap	37.40089	-80.57723
Shelter	War Spur	37.39756931	-80.47402506
Shelter	Laurel Creek	37.35889586	-80.42089391
Shelter	Sarver Hollow	37.35462	-80.33762

Latitude/Longitude Location Table

TYPE	NAME	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
Shelter	Niday	37.38764455	-80.2642286
Shelter	Pickle Branch	37.38009	-80.18482
Shelter	Fullhardt Knob	37.39846172	-79.8539057
Shelter	Wilson Creek	37.41936826	-79.78583087
Shelter	Bobblet's Gap	37.46705	-79.70144
Shelter	Cove Mountain	37.51157099	-79.65095801
Shelter	Bryant Ridge	37.53007884	-79.58583499
Shelter	Cornelius Creek	37.49379458	-79.54724323
Shelter	Thunder Hill	37.52739733	-79.50414128
Shelter	Matts creek	37.59946607	-79.41347766
Shelter	Johns Hollow	37.61272125	-79.39203081
Shelter	Punchbowl	37.67782652	-79.33869339
Shelter	Brown Mountain Creek	37.709268	-79.26862765
Shelter	Cow Camp Gap	37.7449894	-79.21294957
Shelter	Seeley Woodworth	37.81897522	-79.15531649
Shelter	The Priest	37.81759656	-79.07059518
Shelter	Harpers Creek	37.85614738	-79.0008011
Shelter	Maupin Field	37.88478283	-78.99381534